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DE RUEHSI #3011 3371258
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 031258Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8355
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 003011

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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/02/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV GG

SUBJECT: GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT TAKES FIRST STEP TO ALLOW
IMEDI TO BROADCAST AGAIN

REF: TBILISI 2777

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Burjanadze Calls on Courts to Allow Imedi to Open

¶11. (U) In a December 3 press conference, Acting President Nino Burjanadze instructed the Prosecutor General to ask the Tbilisi City Court to unfreeze the assets of Imedi TV. Burjanadze said she hoped the legal process would be finalized in two days, and that Imedi employees would be able to enter the station by December 5 and prepare to begin broadcasting. Formal campaigning by presidential candidates is to begin that day. Burjanadze said negotiations with Imedi and News Corp are continuing and that Georgian authorities expect a response by December 7 to conditions laid down by the government to allow the station to begin broadcasting. (Note: As far as we know, the response prepared by News Corp to Georgian proposals and shared with the USG has not been delivered to PM Gurgenidze.) Burjanadze added that progress to reopening the station could be speeded up if "there is a readiness from Imedi's side." The government anticipates Imedi will need time to prepare the station and repair damage done during the initial November 7 closure before broadcasting can begin (reftel). Burjanadze addressed the general media environment in Georgia and said the press needs to cover all events adequately, objectively and transparently, follow ethical and professional standards in order to assist in carrying out elections democratically, and provide each presidential candidate equal broadcast time.

In her press conference, Burjanadze insisted that opposition predictions of an unfair election are unfounded and called on law enforcement to ensure stability and react to cases of violence appropriately.

¶12. (C) Polish media ombudsman Adam Michnik and EU Special Representative to the South Caucasus Peter Semneby held meetings with Georgian government officials, including PM Lado Gurgenidze, Acting President Nino Burjanadze, and presidential candidate Mikheil Saakashvili, between December 1-2. Michnik told the Ambassador on December 2 the Georgians had made the fundamental decision to reopen Imedi television but did not provide an exact date for broadcasts to begin. EU representatives told the Ambassador the government had seemed to make its decision independently of News Corp. Gurgenidze had raised issues over "pinning down" the ownership of Imedi as part of the agreement to restart broadcasts, but Michnik bluntly told the PM it was more important to open the channel and "work out the business deals later."

¶13. (C) Michnik told Ambassador he intends to create an Advisory council to monitor the media during the election campaign, separate from the Media Council created by the

Georgian press and government. Michnik refused an offer by the GOG to provide him with names of individuals to serve on the council. Michnik intends to choose for himself journalists and academics from among those he knows. His council will monitor the press and issue a weekly statement to point out problems and violations of European media norms.

There are still a lot of details to be worked out, but Michnik told EUR Assistant Secretary Fried via telephone that he is "cautiously optimistic." Michnik left for Poland December 2 but plans to return for the reopening of Imedi.

TEFFT